City, Urban Transformation and the Right to the City

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A B S T R A C T

This article investigates the relationship between transformation of cities and the right to the city. To be able to do this, the problems that are created by contemporary urbanization such as social exclusion, poverty and environmental degradation are discussed in the first part. After that, with a special focus on the period starting with industrial revolution up until today, the article explains economic and political motivations behind urban transformation. This part emphasizes how urban change under different forms of capitalism creates and deepens social inequalities in cities. Final part of this article will be a discussion on the right to the city, and its relation to these urban issues.

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1. Introduction

We are living in an age of planetary urbanization (Brenner and Schmid, 2011), and some of the problems that today's cities encounter are unprecedented in history of urbanization. According to Brenner and Schmid, what we understood as city and urban has shifted in scale and function within the last 30 years. New mega-urban regions in several parts of the world started to emerge, swallowing their peripheries, rearticulating both geographically and functionally what used to be former city centers and hinterlands and eradicating nature and wildlife (Brenner and Schmid, 2011). The number of megacities with a population of ten million or more inhabitants has shifted from 10 to 28 between the years 1990 and 2014, and it is expected to rise up to 41 in 2030 (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2015). According to the

World Urbanization Prospects report of United Nations, one of the most important problems of this fast urban growth and expansion is the increase in world urban population. The percentage of the world's population living in urban areas increased from 30% in 1950s to 54% in 2014. The same report predicts that the world urban population will rise up to 66% of the whole world population by 2050 (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2015). Increase in urban population also means a decrease in rural population, which also means less people to work in small agriculture farms. Consequently to

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be able to feed the growing urban population of the world, larger scale and more industrialized agriculture practices are being applied which result in environmental degradation such as deforestation, degeneration of ecosystems, loss of soil and the production of corps with reduced nutrition values. All these environmental distortions cause social consequences such as unemployment, poverty, and hunger.

As world cities grow and expand as social, cultural and economic attraction centers for millions of people, they also grow as centers of social exclusion, unemployment and urban poverty, privatization and commodification of urban land and housing. The consequences of these problems are especially visible in informal living areas, such as squatter settlements, favelas or slums. It is estimated that one third of world population is living in slum areas located in geographically dangerous zones, surrounded with landfills, without access to clean water and sewerage system, such as Kibera (Nairobi, Kenya), Rocinha (Rio De Janerio, Brazil), and Dharavi (Mumbai, India) (UN – HABITAT, 2003).

In addition to economic and social problems, the overgrowth of cities also brings environmental challenges. Starting from the middle of the 20th century, global warming and consequently climate change has been one of the key factors affecting, and actually threatening ecosystems and human habitats. One of the primary reasons of global warming is considered to be greenhouse gas emissions due to human activities (IPCC, 2014). Big cities, with their crowded populations, are places of concentration of these activities and accordingly they are areas where food, water, energy and all kinds of products are being consumed the most.

Cities are becoming heat islands as a result of energy consumption needed for production of electricity, transportation, heating and cooling (Torrey, 2004). Contribution of cities in environmental pollution, global warming and climate change is increased due to:

- greenhouse gas emissions owing to overconsumption of natural resources;

- growing landfills as a result of waste arising from consumption of goods in cities;

- erosion of wildlife and natural areas surrounding these cities

In the following part, this paper will provide a historical analysis regarding today's urban conditions with a focus on the period starting with the industrial revolution, and try to answer following questions:

- why and how cities grow?

- what are the economic and political motivations behind their transformations?

- what are the socio-spatial results of these changes? And how is the idea of the right to the city related to these changes?

Cities in Transformation: Growth Based on Inequality

As dynamic structures cities both create and emerge from physical, social, environmental and economic phenomena (Roberts, 2003) and they are in a constant process of transformation due to the rapid change of these processes. Throughout history, they have been the areas where different people lived together for economic, social and cultural production and exchange, and their physical spaces had been shaped as the embodiment of these social organizations (Thorns, 2004).

In his seminal book "The Production of Space", Henri Lefebvre states that every social organization forms specific physical spaces in consequence of social relationships; therefore, these social organizations also reproduce themselves within those physical spaces (Lefèbvre, 1996). At this point, Lefebvre presents the difference between social and abstract space: the social space is where the daily life experiences of each member of the society occurs. On the contrary, the abstract space is the hierarchical space of politicians, capitalists and planners trying to control the social space of daily life. It is torn down, homogenized and commodified by the power, authority and capital (Gottdiener, 1993). By associating the production of abstract space with the emergence of the capitalist system, Lefebvre has brought forward the transformation of "use value" arising from the occurrence of daily lives of people in social space, into "exchange value" for politicians, planners and investors approaching the space as a good that can be traded and shaped according to the market dynamics (Lefèbvre, 1996).

In today's cities, the contradiction between use value and exchange value have become even more explicit. Today, main driving force behind many urban design and development projects is to attract the global capital, finance and international professional elite to cities, a target

set by neo-liberal economy policies. Projects of luxurious residential buildings, gated communities, shopping and retail centers are realized through privatization and commodification of urban environments from land to water, from nature to history. As a result of this economic system and urbanization approach, more people are becoming impoverished and dispossessed, and forced to live under condition of poverty, without access to proper housing, infrastructure and public services. The environmental and social cost of this transformation is paid off by the impoverished and the dispossessed.

These physical divisions and social polarizations undermine the culture of living together and boost xenophobia and racism. Identity problems and ethnic, cultural and religious divisions make cities spaces of conflict and consequently cities lose their characteristics of being places of co-existence and mutual-exchange.

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the rapid industrialization process causing several irreversible changes notably in Europe came with spatial impositions and accelerated the transformation of use value of space into exchange value. As a consequence of transition from the rural production into a new production system which started to be performed in cities principally with the factory system, the population has started to be densified in cities rather than rural areas and cities have become the centres of capitalist production. Hobsbawm defines this new type of society and production as "industrial capitalism based on factory" (Hobsbawm, 1998).

The fast industrializing cities of that period were facing pollution problems arising from the rapid population growth, industrial production, unplanned developments and poor dwelling conditions. Narrow streets which did not allow sunrise reach to buildings, houses with no toilet or sewerage and lack of access to clean water in daily life due to usage of water in the industry turned industrial cities into unhealthy living environments where diseases could easily spread (Lampugnani, 1985).

Expressing his observations regarding the great industrial towns of England, Friedrich Engels writes the inhumane conditions working classes experienced during this period in his book entitled "The Condition of the Working Class in England" (1844). According to Engels, the new configuration of the city is a physical reflection of distinction between classes being the most distinctive characteristic of capitalism. While talking about his observations on Manchester city, Engels describes the contrast between the factories and commercial zones located in the city centre surrounded by workers' housings in unhealthy conditions and the clean and organized upper/middle class dwelling zones, and suggests that this contrast originates from the exploitation of working classes by the upper classes (Thorns, 2004).

Pressures on the urban spaces arising from the new technical improvements and health conditions led the foundations of the urban planning to be laid especially between 1830 and 1850. It can be observed that during this period, health legislations and urban reforms came into operation in several industrial cities of Europe (Benevolo, 1977). In 1848, regulations for enhancing the living conditions of the working class were put into practice with the emergence of the first "Public Health Act" in England. In 1850-1863, new housings for workers started to be constructed outside of the city centres in Europe and America under the name of company towns (Lampugnani, 1985). Lampugnani addresses that the driving force behind the improvement works for the living conditions of the workers was not only providing a healthier life environment for them but also ensuring to get higher efficiency from them by means of ameliorating their standard of living (Lampugnani, 1985).

One of the most extensive urban interferences of this period is the renovation of Paris prepared by city planner Georges-Eugène Haussmann who was entrusted by Napoleon III to create a new urban plan for Paris in the 19th century. Having the transportation problem at its focal point, this plan aimed at improving the "hygienic conditions" by destroying "dirty" streets spreading diseases, in accordance with a sense of aesthetics suitable for the monumental style of the period; solving the traffic problem and preventing the riots and rebellions by creating an order that could enable the troops to move easily within the city. Subsequent to the plan, large boulevards were opened in the central area of Paris between 1853 and 1869, thus, thousands of houses were demolished across the city and many had to leave the city, workers and craftsmen being the majority (Lampugnani, 1985).

David Harvey evaluates Haussmann's plan as a device for resolving the added surplus value and unemployment problems by means of town planning, and claims that as a result of his work, Haussmann has changed the scale urban processes were envisioned (Harvey, 2008). Haussmann's Renovation of Paris is an example of the hegemony placed on the social space by the abstract space. A new function assigned for the urban space (planned abstract space)

suggested by administrators or investors developed in contrast with the opinions of people living in that urban space and their use of urban space (social space). This contradiction is effective in the embodiment, development and transformation of today's cities as well (Gotham, Shefner, and Brumley, 2001).

In today's cities, we see the transformative power of globalization and neo-liberal economy policies affecting the whole world for almost last 40 years. By the end of 1970s, the world economic system started to enter a new restructuring process. In these years, by benefiting from the technological improvements providing mobility and remote control, large industrial corporations of "developed countries" began to direct their production functions towards "developing countries" with lower cost of labour in an attempt to increase their rates of profit (Fainstein, 1990). The transnational mobility of capital and investment diminishing the regulating role of central governments in countries' economies led the big cities of the world such as New York, London and Tokyo to become control and decision making centers in economy and finance (Sassen, 1998). As a consequence of the capital investment being shifted from industrialized countries to developing countries, crucial decreases in industrial employment started to be experienced within the regions where industries left (Judd and Parkinson, 1990). This paved the way for unemployment and poverty problems for the workers labouring in traditional industries. During the 1980s neo-liberal economy policies started to gain wide prevalence subsequent to free market supporter governments coming to power in countries with strong economies such as the UK and the USA. This formula of economic development resulted in substantial decrease in the regulatory role of the states. Free trade, deregulation, low inflation and privatization were determined as the major economic growth formula for developed countries, with a strong belief that investors should be free to direct their investments to any part of the world for minimizing their expenditures (Ellwood, 2002). Companies expanding their production and market functions worldwide gave rise to the development of service sector involving communication, computer, finance, accounting, management, marketing, law, media and advertising. These services enable the capital to function and centralize on a global scale by providing the opportunity for companies to remotely control their production and distribution functions in other parts of the world (Keyder and Öncü,1994). With the service sector coming into prominence, the industrial employment dominating several advanced economies of the world in 1960s gave its place to the service sector employment at the beginning of 1980s. However, although it had expanded, the employment in service sector could not recover the losses of job in the production sector (Judd and Parkinson, 1990).

With neo-liberal economy getting stronger, the ability of responding to market forces became an essential priority for the governments and consequently the welfare state model of the previous period foreseeing balanced socio-economic and spatial development gradually lost its power. As a result of decrease in welfare expenses, the funds transferred by the central governments to the urban governments were lowered. This reduction of budget forced cities to implement more entrepreneurial and competitive management patterns for the purpose of establishing new economic resources (Hall and Hubbard, 1996 and Harvey, 1989). Subsequently, urban managements started to improve their partnerships with the private sector. These public private partnership applications strengthened the political power of capital owners and corporations (Özdemir, 2010).

Within this competitive environment, urban managements began to work for producing more marketable city images with the aim of attracting the capital which gained a worldwide mobility as high technology industries, employment, new administrative and managerial institutions, various cultural activities and tourism (Paddison, 1993). Within this framework, new urban policies for reinvigorating the economy, and parallel to that several prestige projects implemented in this direction started to emerge, initially in North America, then in several European countries, particularly in England. Former industrial areas and buildings within the city centres were refurbished with new functions such as business, retail, culture and sports facilities in order to trigger the property market. The primary aims of these developments, which were pioneered by mega-projects involving trade and recreation oriented transformations of port districts in coastal towns of North America are to enliven the economy by attracting tourists and investors to cities (Özdemir, 2010).

Early examples of prestige projects first appeared as rehabilitation projects in coastal areas within the port cities of North America, and then they became widespread all around the world. Boston Quincy Market where old market buildings within the port area were

renovated as restaurants, shops and entertainment spaces; South Street Seaport including restaurants, cafés, shopping centres and a museum constructed upon the renewal of historical trade buildings in New York Port area; and Port of Baltimore where historical warehouses and quay structures were destroyed and improved as culture and festival spaces can be arrayed as examples of these projects which had significant impacts on their European counterparts (Bianchini, 1993). Birmingham International Convention Centre, Canary Wharf office buildings in London Docklands, renovation of Duisburg Port area in the region of Ruhr, Kop van Zuid in Rotterdam and projects of Waterfront Hall and Belfast Hilton in Belfast can be set as examples for prestige projects implemented in Europe during the 1980s (Percy, 2003).

The reason behind the occurrence of these projects, which can be encountered in several big cities of the world, is to provide physical and economic recovery through refunctioning derelict industrial zones of cities or to renovate urban decline areas having economic, social and physical problems. Although it is assumed that, with the economic recovery arising from a large-scale investment made in a specific area of the city, the projects would have a positive impact on everyone living within the region, many cases do not actually meet with this expectation. In many cities around the world, the results obtained would be a gap expanding gradually between "authentic", "hygienic", "bright" and "safe" neighbourhoods arranged for tourism and consumption with luxurious housing, business, retail and entertainment facilities, and the increasing number of slums with poor conditions, ghetto settlements and neighbourhoods evacuated for the purpose of renovation. While one part of the city is developing in a way that will meet the needs of executives and professionals received education at international standards, the other part involves a class increasingly being marginalized by the new economic system. This situation paves the way for a polarized society which the inequality between two ends increases day by day.

The Right to the City: An Inclusive Framework?

How do all these developments affect people living in cities? It seems that there is not much problem for those from the high-income group, because the projects are already aimed at defending their interests and spreading their lifestyle. How about those staying out of the global city envisagement? Urban poors, ethnic-religious minorities, women, children, elderly people, immigrants, nomads, non-regular workers, individuals with disabilities, LGBTQ individuals, homeless people…

Urban regeneration projects affecting the poor neighbourhoods of the city make already poor and vulnerable individuals and groups even more needy and fragile. Urban poor, losing their homes, businesses, social securities, health and education opportunities and, most importantly, their social networks that connect them to life, are being pushed into a more excluded and marginal position within the society. Fast growing inequality and social exclusion come with the violations of human right in urban space. People who are forced to live their houses due to regeneration projects are also deprived of their basic rights such as employment, education, social security, rest and leisure, participation in the political decision-making processes and adequate and healthy living conditions, which are the fundamental human rights stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In summary, the urban space produces inequality and social exclusion to the extent that it is the object of the capital and mega investments.

Can we think of the right to the city as a solution to the problems in the urban space arising from urban regeneration projects and the abstract space's hegemony on the social space? Suggested in 1968 by Henri Lefebvre, the idea of the right to the city lays emphasis on "need to restructure the power relations that underlie the production of urban space, fundamentally shifting control away from capital and the state and toward urban inhabitants" (Purcell, 2002). According to Lefebvre, the production of urban space also means "reproducing the social relations that are bound up in it" (Purcell, 2002). For this reason, it requires much more than planning the physical space; "it involves producing and reproducing all aspects of urban life" (Purcell, 2002). The right to the city involves two fundamental rights for urban inhabitants: the right to oeuvre (participation) and the right to appropriation. The right to participation asserts that inhabitants of the city must play a central role in all decisions contributing the production of urban life. The right to appropriation is the right to physical access, presence and use that can be summarized as inhabitants' physical existence in the urban space (Purcell, 2002).

Lefebvre's idea of the right to the city has been the source of inspiration for struggles regarding the access to urban public space and citizenship rights in many countries around the

world. Academic studies conducted in this field emphasize a new concept of citizenship and bring forward a variety of issues related to that such as use of public spaces, accessibility in urban space, access to water, immigration, male domination, homelessness, globalization, urban regeneration, social justice and urban citizenship (UN-HABITAT, ISSC, UNESCO, 2010). As a result of these problems starting to be discussed in detail, various charters and declarations about providing human rights in cities have been constituted through discussions, meetings and gatherings of several NGO's, human rights groups and local governments at international, regional, national and local levels. At global scale, World Charter on the Right to the City was first presented at the Social Forum of the Americas in Quito, and at the 2nd World Urban Forum in Barcelona in 2004 by HIC, COHRE, FNRU and Action Aid, and in 2005 World Charter for the Right to the City was adopted at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil (Meyer, 2009). The European Urban Charter was adopted by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe in 1992 and was updated in 2008 under the title European Urban Charter II - Manifesto for a new urbanity with a focus on sustainability (Council of Europe, 2009). In addition to this, European Charter for Women in the City, a research study supported by the Commission of the European Union's Equal Opportunities Unit dated 1994 (EUROCULTURES et.al, 1994) and The European Charter for the Safeguarding of Human Rights in the City, first drafted in "Cities for Human Rights Conference" in Barcelona in 1998, and finalized and adopted in Saint-Denis in 2000 can be given as examples of charters at regional level (United Cities and Local Governments, 2012). At national level, The Brazilian Federal Law on Urban Development, known as the The City Statute of Brazil was accepted as a part of the federal constitution in 2001 (Cities Alliance & Brazil Ministry of Cities, 2010). At city scale, the Montréal Charter of Rights and Responsibilities was first adopted in 2005 by the Montréal City Council, and it came into force in 2006 (Montreal City Council, 2005). Apart from the City Statute of Brazil, above mentioned charters are not legally binding documents, but rather texts of commitment to universal values of democracy, justice, equity and inclusion that can be used as guidelines for local governance. Although their focuses may vary, there are some common issues that all of them try to respond such as equality and non-discrimination, housing, health, education, employment, security, participation and democratic representation, equitable development, healthy environment, infrastructure and public services, transportation, culture, recreation, and access to information.

The right to the city as defined in these documents is based on protecting and strengthening the rights of all inhabitants, especially poor, ethnic-religious-cultural minorities, refugees, immigrants, nomads, disabled individuals, those living under the risk in terms of health and environmental conditions and those exposed to violence, and among these particularly the vulnerable ones as elderly people, women and children (Montreal City Council, 2005). These documents, aiming at creating an operational framework for the right to the city through restructuring the Universal Human Rights at the level of local governments, underline the social, cultural, political and environmental development in cities, involving social inclusion, democratic representation and participation, mutual tolerance and social solidarity, along with the economic and physical improvement. They also emphasize that in order to achieve these, a city should be provided with services such as shelter, health, education, employment, recreation and entertainment, culture, transportation and infrastructure in a way that all inhabitants can easily and equally benefit from these amenities. Additionally, these documents hold the local governments responsible for the provision of above mentioned services in cities.

The most significant role of these charters and declarations is their possibility of constituting a guiding framework on the subject of human rights in the city during the process of urban policy making. The existence of such a framework carries the potential of transforming the concepts about human rights into devices that can be used at local level in the formation of decision-making and policy production mechanisms; defining what rights mean in the daily lives of urban inhabitants; creating control mechanisms guaranteeing that management units in various levels act in accordance with human rights, and ensuring that local laws comply with international and national human rights commitments. Generating such a legal framework based on the right to the city is an important step towards creating a democratic and equalitarian urban life enabling all inhabitants to speak out their demands and rights. Of course creation of such a framework, which ensures the protection and provision of human rights in urban policy making, can only be possible with the participation of urban inhabitants.

Although this pragmatic understanding of the right to the city concept adapted in the production of the charters related to urban rights has the potential of providing an operational framework for urban policy making, the same understanding bears the risk of undermining the transformative and revolutionary essence of Lefebvre's notion of the right to the city as a right to transform our cities and ourselves (Meyer, 2009). On the one hand, as these documents target certain aspects of neo-liberal urban agenda, rather than transforming the neo-liberal system itself, they remain as tools for good urban governance operating within the existing system without altering it. On the other hand, listing of vulnerable groups even with the purpose of prioritizing their urban rights - as any listing carries the potential of excluding some non-listed groups - is as dangerous as conceptualizing an undefined "urban inhabitants" group as the holders of these rights - since this urban inhabitants group includes individuals, groups or corporations who hold and exert economic and political power over others who are somehow excluded from these power relations, oppressed and deprived of their rights. Therefore, with this depoliticized tone, and unclear connotations, urban rights can only serve "neoliberalism with a human touch" (Meyer, 2009).

For this reason, if we want a real change in our cities and in our lives, we need a clear definition of content and target of the right to the city. If we put it with Marcuse's words, we have to be aware of "whose right, what right and to what city" (Marcuse, 2009) we are talking about. For Marcuse, the right to the city embraces people who are deprived of means of meeting their basic needs, and accessing their fundamental rights, people who are excluded from the system and exploited by others; and alienated and oppressed because of their social and cultural identities. The right to the city is not a set of individualistic, singular rights to some listed provisions and amenities within the existing legal system, but a collective and holistic right to have a say to change that system for better. Marcuse explains Lefebvre's conception of city in the right to the city as the city of future. In opposition to general understanding and interpretation of the city as existing city with its physical reality and materiality, the conception of the city of future implies an ideal urban society, which fulfills "justice, equity, democracy, the full development of human potentials or capabilities, to all according to their needs, from all according to their abilities, the recognition of human differences" (Marcuse, 2009).

Conflict of interests
The Authors declare no conflict of interest.

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